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## Conference Snapshots – ICM Reflections



Rev. Gary Luther Myers delivering the Association Meeting keynote address

The Alabama/Tennessee /Mississippi Association held a meeting at Church of the Savior in Knoxville on September 13-14. The agenda proposed a vote on a resolution to dissolve the Association. But before the resolution came to the floor of the meeting for a vote, God's Spirit seemed to prevail – Robert's Rules of Order were suspended to allow general discussion. It was clear that a majority of those present saw the need for change, but the delegates did not feel ready to dissolve the Association. Over and over delegates affirmed their history of congregations and individuals



being connected, and affirmed the value of the resulting relationships. What followed was a creative solution: a task force was named to work on imagining a new future. That task force will then present a different resolution for a vote at the next Association meeting. My guess is that it will be a different kind of structure that doesn't rely on elected officers and formal meetings ... but instead it will offer a new way of gathering UCC folk in regional settings for fellowship, education, and fun!

I came away from that meeting encouraged by what had evolved and clear about the particular need to find new ways to connect congregations and church leaders within our huge geography, diversity of people and ministries. With this in mind, rather than sharing my current thoughts on theological or social issues (that is, writing something like a blog entry), I want instead to share a mix of "snapshots" of experiences gathered over the past month as I have traveled among you and witnessed a fascinating mix of valued tradition and exciting new models of ministry:

**BLOGS** - If you want to read some interesting blogs, here are a few I've recently discovered among some of our pastors: Michael Pater (at [central-ucc.org](http://central-ucc.org)); Jeremy Rutledge ([his blog is here](#), the church website is [circularchurch.org](http://circularchurch.org)); Kimberleigh Buchanan (at [pilgrimageucc.org](http://pilgrimageucc.org)); and David Brown (at [pilgrim-church.com](http://pilgrim-church.com)). As you check these local church websites be sure to look at the numerous other examples of exciting new ministries being carried out by just these four congregations (and we have many more!). And when you are on the Circular website, be sure to look at deep history (dating back to 1681) mixed with the new (their new green building). After wandering through the historic graveyard at Circular Karen and I met with Jeremy and talked about ministry in SECUCC. We talked about the problems of distance and isolation -how are pastors able to be connected. I suggested to Jeremy that he check out Michael Pater's blog – it seemed very similar in form and content to his own, and perhaps they could find ways to link. To my surprise Jeremy said: "I know Michael, we did CPE together! Yes, I need to get in touch with him now that I'm settled in here."

## **ANOTHER LINK**

- We have two new congregations that are experimenting with being linked across some miles: Praxis in Atlanta and Praxis in Americus. Not only do they share names, but as you may recall one of the pastors in Atlanta (Leah Lyman-Waldron) was ordained at the same time as the pastor in Americus (Kirk Lyman-Barner) at Central UCC in Atlanta. Same names for two congregations ... and even similar names for two pastors – although they're not related by blood. Both congregations are working together on web presence, and both have a deep passion for mission. And in the case of Kirk Lyman-Barner, his "day job" is linked with another rich ministry as he serves as the Director of U.S. Field Operations for the Fuller Center ([fullercenter.org](http://fullercenter.org)). I've now worshiped with each of these congregations, and in each the smaller group (gathered in the Central UCC parlor and in Kirk's home) reflected the spirit and vitality of the early Church. Being



in Americus evokes other histories as well: Clarence Jordan and Koinonia; Millard Fuller and Habitat for Humanity as well as the Fuller Center; and Jimmy Carter!

### **ADDITIONAL RICH HISTORY**

- after the Knoxville Association meeting (where I also experienced a sense of exciting, welcoming ministry occurring in Church of the Savior), Karen and I traveled on to visit Uplands Retirement Community and Pleasant Hill UCC. There we met a number of friends from past ministries across the UCC; we saw the positive changes taking place at Uplands (e.g., expansion of assisted living and memory care facilities);

and we got to experience a unique blend of history with the new. If you check out the new church website ([pleasanthilluccn.org](http://pleasanthilluccn.org)) you can meet their new interim pastor (Nayiri Karjian); read about the deep history of Uplands ("Mission Without Boundaries" written by a resident UCC pastor, Ted Braun – among the interesting facts is that ca. 35 residents of Uplands have served in ministries in other countries!); and see their green building renovation.

### **AND A HISTORY UNIQUE TO THE SOUTH**

- As you know, SECUCC has a rich history of ministries and congregations founded by the AMA following the Civil War. I touched on this fact last month when I talked about visiting First Congregational UCC in Atlanta, and since then I've been able to visit our congregations in Thomasville and Savannah. In each place one feels the cloud of witnesses who were leaders in the Civil Rights movement over the years, and at the same time one sees the movement into the future. For example, at First Congregational UCC the pastor, Dwight Andrews, not only leads a vibrant congregation but he also carries its presence out into the world as he shares his gifts in music with the recent Atlanta Music Festival and the upcoming Jazz for the Journey symposium in Cleveland. And after a recent visit to Thomasville to meet their new pastor, James Banks, and



Rev. Kirk Lyman-Barner preparing for worship at Praxis UCC in Americus



two lay leaders, I am planning a return there on October 27 to install James as their new pastor – an installation that won't be the usual UCC installation since James comes out of the AME and is not yet authorized with us. James is also a musician and previously served as the church organist for Bethany UCC in Thomasville!

### **FINALLY, SOME OTHER EXAMPLES OF MOVING INTO THE FUTURE -**

The Center for Progressive Renewal was born here in the SECUCC, and their two co-executive Directors (Cameron Trimble and Michael Piazza) are now doing exciting things on line (including daily blogs they call “[Liberating Word](#)”) as they help us create a new Church for the future ... and as they work on living out their ideas as co-pastors at our Virginia Highlands congregation. Our own Pathways learning program is doing a similar thing with its focus on lay education. And Decatur UCC is now streaming live its worship service (check this out at [Livestream.com/decatuucc](http://Livestream.com/decatuucc) for a sample of Glenna Shepherd with her colleagues and warm congregation in worship.)

Well, those are my snapshots for now. I know that there are many more to visit and experience in the coming days, and I celebrate the many ways that God is Still Speaking in our midst!

**– Shalom, Randy**

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#### **About Randy Hyvonen**

After 18 years of conference ministry in Ohio, Pacific NW, and Montana-North Wyoming, Randy retired in 2011. Recently he's was lured back into service by the opportunity to help the Southeast Conference “bridge the gap” as it looks for a new Designated

Conference Minister.

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< Caring for Veterans “Grand Rounds” Event in Atlanta

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Conference Events

- Sep 30
- All Day - Retreat for Retired UCC Clergy
- Oct 11
- 5:00 PM - Board of Director's Meeting
- Oct 12
- 7:30 AM - Board of Director's Meeting
- Oct 13
- 11:30 AM - Atlanta Pride March
- Oct 18
- All Day - Women's UCC Southern Regional Conference

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OCTOBER 2, 2013



**Prayer for Global Ministries trip to the Congo**  
OCTOBER 1, 2013



**Southeast Conference Churches to March Together in Atlanta Pride**  
SEPTEMBER 24, 2013



**Celebrate Atlanta’s civil rights history at the Atlanta Music Festival**  
SEPTEMBER 16, 2013



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March with other SEC churches at Atlanta Pride! #constantcontact <http://t.co/BqVOEMargi> 5 days ago

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